

Root Pruning Fencerow Habitat

Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry



Farmers have eliminated a large amount of fencerow/hedgerow habitat in an effort to maximize crop production. The general belief has been that shading by the trees and shrubs at the edges of a field hurts crop production. However, the reason for dwarfed crops at these edges is not so much shading as it is competition for water and soil nutrients between the roots of trees and crops. Tree roots can be pruned by deep plowing so they won't compete with crops. This allows both undiminished crop yield and valuable wildlife habitat to exist side-by-side.

Root pruning is done with a single shank ripper that will cut to a depth of approximately 24 inches or deeper, pulled by a tractor of at least 50 HP. Two or three passes are needed, sinking the plow deeper with each pass. Cut a furrow along the edge of the agricultural field, usually 15 feet or so from the center of the fencerow or a foot or so toward the field from the drip-line of the trees. Root pruning can be done in any season, whenever the ground can be worked. The interval between treatments will vary, depending upon the tree and shrub species present, soil types, and other growing conditions for the area. Generally speaking, root pruning should be done every four or five years in Tennessee.

WARNING -- Root pruning involves plowing deep enough to hit **underground utility cables or pipelines**. Be sure to check the area for such obstacles before starting root pruning operations.

(adapted from the Kentucky Division of Forestry.)